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DE RERUM NATURA.

I. THE PROBLEM.

WHEN thought, to comprehend the universe
Strains outward, holy awe enthrills the soul.
With reverence only dare we lift the eye
To front the congregation of the worlds,—
The All of life, ensouling suns and motes,
That since the measureless eternities,
Obedient to the cosmoplastic laws,
In rhythmic throes of palingenesis,
Creates new worlds of those destroyed. With awe
O Cosmos! doth he contemplate thy ways
Whose peering glass surveys the teeming heaven.
Before the mystery that in thee lives
Bewildered stands the grey philosopher.
Thou like the ocean art, from whose abyss
Wave upon wave majestically swells
To sink again adown the darksome sea.

Upon thy bank, Ocean of Worlds, behold
The poet musing stands! What longings stir
His dreamy heart! and as in prayer, the soul

With full devotion rings harmoniously!
Yet through his hallowed mood of worship jars
The discord of the doubter's questionings :
“And wilt thou venture it, th' impossible,
“To celebrate in song the infinite?
“How shalt thou praise the universe, forsooth,
“On which millenniums have tired themselves
“With probings after truth? The Sciences
“A pæan are, whose cadences unfold
“In richer numbers than thy harp can yield—
“A hymn whose notes seraphic are the souls
“Who loftiest rise from out humanity.”

Yea, but emotions yearn for utterance
When I the order contemplate which rules,
And with unfailing, sleepless law the love
And hatred sways of atoms numberless,—
The order that enthralleth every part
To service of the whole, till nebulae
To systems grow of constellated worlds,—
The order, too, whose governance directs
The budding race of cells to unity,
Allotting so the labor of the whole,
That organisms deftly shape themselves.

“And this thou laudest?” ’rose the bitter voice
That fain the poet’s cosmic psalm would hush,
“Forget not then how Justice smiteth him
“Who, finding not his duty to the whole,

“In restive selfhood shirks. Inexorably
“The guiltless with the guilty feel the smart.”

That know I well, for life hath shown to me
How much of misery the heart may hold.
Ay, every effort is with grief entwined
And anxious care. Without the battle's brunt,
No victory; and every conflict brings
Its wounds. But lo ! a goal forever lures
And woos the weariness of toiling feet
Around a centre dreamed of, but unseen.
I know it well, yet have I also found
That pain's tuition is ennobling life,
And our endeavor gives to toil its worth.
In equal measure Nature suffering doles
With pleasure's sweetening apportionment ;
And only he who lives is doomed to die.
And this is justice, therefore murmur not.
An even risk all preference besets.
With equity's unbending sternness ever
And with impartial love are we embraced.
The burden must be sore that winneth worth.
Yet what thou suff'rest in the press of strife,
Thou must submit to for humanity
Which liveth in thy heart, inspiring thee
The goal to win that shimmers to thy dream,
And goading thee life's mysteries to solve.
When I the nameless misery behold
That trembles through the individual soul,

And though my work in idle piecemeal lay,
I upward look and consolation seek
In cosmic Unity's eternal bliss.
Then hope, a-yearn within my bosom, saith :
Lo, every dissonance must be attuned
If thou the pulsing harmony wouldst hear
That swelleth from the chorded galaxies.

Let not the insufficiency of self
Mislead : being a part, thou serv'st the whole.
Permit not that thy aspirations flag,
Of weariness and tribulation galled.
When in death's agony thy heart must break,
When day declines and light of consciousness,
Do not, O heart, despair ! for thou remainest
Within the bosom of the All. The stream
That finds the sea meets not extinction there.
In transitoriness is life accursed ;
But transient, too, are all our cares and griefs.
When silence darkens round the failing breath
The evils vanish that disquiet us,
And death, life's holy consummation, brings
The benison of immortality.

II. THE SOUL.

Here am I, imaged in the glass of Self,
And eager in desire to dare and do.
Life, warm and pulsing, tingles in my veins,
And restlessly thought's lightning flashes dart.
Pause thee, O Soul, and think upon thyself !
What art thou, then, and whence dost darkling come?
What goal is luring, and the purpose what
That to thy strivings consecration gives?
Declare thy nature to thyself, O Soul,
And read thy features in awareness traced.

Kaleidoscopic splendors haunt mine eye,
Picturing ambient Nature's shifting shapes,
And through mine ear pierce tonal messages.
Each sense its typical investment weaves,
Which, wrapt in mem'ry's immortality,
Shall rise anon like Lazarus untombed.
From out commercing excitations, bred
Of interfused sensations manifold,
The staple forms of concepts crystallise,
To union drawn by psychic kindredship.
As thought with kindred thought conjoins, behold
How lucid grows the rising realm of mind !
The restlessness which here for action yearns,
Gains aim and purpose ; regulated are

The tangled contraries of promptings wild
In calm tranquillity of self-control.

What wildering manifoldness ! yet how all
In multitudinous unity entwined,
Creates the glorious fashion of the soul !
And this I call my Self. What cadencing
Of tones ! what odor-sensing ! what rare life !
And all, yea all, hath meaning : what befalls
Denoteth streams and forests and the stars,
Denoteth brothers, joys and racking pains,
Denoteth struggle, wrath and enemies.
The pictures and ideas symbols are
Revealing to the Self its own Beyond.

Beyond I hear the clangor of the world ;
But only in myself the voices range.
Beyond, a glim'ring panorama lures ;
But in mine eye the compassed picture lies.
Thus ever do a thousand subtle threads
Me intercatenate with that strange world
Wherein I move. I contemplate the Vision :
Of me it is a part. I am the All ;
Yet that somewhat which into self hath grown
Is of the world a part : This bides, I pass.
But lo ! e'en then, in that which unto me
The not-I seemed, I evermore endure.

Erewhile I came to birth ; the gathered lore
Of tome and sense and life's wide school I've sought.

Declare my place or ever life I knew.
Am I from nothing come, to lapse again
Into nonentity? Nay, into form
Have I been fashioned, and the mould I know
Wherein the features of my Self were wrought.
Not from the blank Inane emerged the soul :
A sacred treasury it is of dreams
And deeds that built the present from the past,
Adding thereto its own experiences.
Ancestral lives are seeing in mine eyes,
Their hearing listeneth within mine ears,
And in my hand their strength is plied again.
Speech came, a rich consignment from the past,
Each word aglow with wondrous spirit life,
Thus building up my soul of myriad souls.

I call that something "I" which seems my soul ;
Yet more the spirit is than ego holds.
For lo ! this ego, where shall it be sought ?
I'm wont to say "I see"; yet 'tis the eye
That sees, and seeing, kind'leth in the thought
The beaming images of memory.
"I hear" we say: Hearing is of the ear ;
And where the caught word stirs, there cords resound
Of slumb'ring sentiment ; and echoes wake
Of sounds that long ago to silence lapsed.
Not dead, perfected only, is the past ;
And ever from the darkness of the grave
It rises to rejuvenated life.

The "I" is but a name to clothe withal
 The clustered mass that now my being forms.
 Take not the symbol for reality—
 The transient for th' eterne. Mine ego, lo!
 'Tis but my spirit's scintillating play
 This fluctuant moment of eternities
 That now are crossing where my heart's blood beats.
 I was not, am, and soon will pass. But never
 My soul shall cease; the breeding ages aye
 Shall know its life. All that the past bequeathed,
 And all that life hath added unto me,
 This shall endure in immortality.

And if the welling spring of spirit-life
 I seek, where but in Nature is it found—
 In that great All whose tiny part I am?
 Yea, holy Nature stampeth into me
 Its being's galaxy of wondrous forms;
 Thus after its own likeness fashioning me.

Something there is eternal in the world
 Of change, in all the tides of motion moveless.
 Law? God? the Logos wouldst thou call it, which
 From the beginning was? Name as thou wilt:
 In ceaseless flux it faithful to itself
 Remains, ubiquitous, determining all
 In unavoidable necessity.
 When I in order would the chaos set
 Of inexhaustible experiences

Reflected in the facets of the sense,
This calm unchanging entity I seek,
And trace my bearings in the restless world.
Th' eternal Voice in reason echoeth,
Which like a compass in our voyagings,
Directs thro' oceans unexplored.

Great All !

O, thou all-comprehensive infinite !
In no ambiguous language speakest thou,
In no uncertain promptings teachest duty.
Thy governance doth in the atom live,
And in the spheric courses of the stars.
Thou fountain whence the beauteous Order springs !
To thee, too, sentient creatures owe their being,
Whom thy warm breath ennobling quickeneth.
Here potent aspirations upward yearn,
As spurning nature's lowly elements.
Thou formest in the soul an empire new
Where thou thy dispensation dost portray.
Thou givest light, and following its gleam,
We grope for paths of truth. Thou art the judge,
And thou the measure, too, of justice art.
In thee all motion of becoming is ;
In thee its motive and its purpose rule.
What from thee springs not alien is to thee ;
And life in thee its only aim can find.
Thy breath it is which warmly thro' it thrills ;
It is thy light that gloweth in the soul.

Into undreamed-of fathoms of thy depth,
O great Creator-power!—into thy bosom
Shall man return. Restless in life, in thee
He finds the holy, termless rest again.

Yea, in this rest which doth remain to us
As life's last aim and refuge evermore—
In this great glory of release from self,
This blissful apotheosis of life,
In this which never was not, and shall be—
Th' immutable amid the changeful All,—
In this my soul its bidding-place shall find.
Thus all my deeds, my pains, my strivings here
With confidence are shaded. This holy spell
Which haunts presagefully the yearning world,
Shall strength amidst my toilings bring to me ;
To brother-love shall rouse and charity ;
To benedictions on my foes shall prompt ;
In fortune it shall cheer, in sorrow soothe ;
The key to all the riddles it shall yield
Which compass me about ; shall show the light
Wherein life's tragedies transfigured glow ;
To thought such vast interpretations it
Shall lend, that Nature's tones will all accord ;
That hatred will in love be overwhelmed,
And rapturous fruition compensate
For all the pains our upward-strivings bring.
This source of spirit-life, in death's despite,
Holds heritage of immortality.

III. THE ALL.

Not dead is matter, though inert it seem.
A hidden life ensouls the eternal mass,
Which ever into quickened forms evolves.
Think not that spirit-germs consignments are
From alien realms of transcendental being :
In matter immanent, their nascent life,
From ancient darkness struggling, seeks the day.
Divinely noble thought, the crowning flower
That on the World-tree grows, concealed hath lain
Within vivific virtues of its root.
An upward impulse penetrates the All,
And nothing is that aspiration lacks.

The torture of the longing who can gauge
That calleth ever out of gravity
For tactual companionship's caress ?
Who knows how congregated atoms thrill
With love's delight, e'en where our feeble eye
But dust in stark inertness contemplates ?

Thus slowly through the fathomless expanse,
In isolated desolation, drift
The ancient fragments of disrupted worlds ;
When lo ! from out the neighb'ring fields of space,
The silver wooings of our sun are flashed.

The errant atoms wax in their desires ;
And fleeter, ever fleeter, sunward speeding,
They kindle into mystic comet-fire,
Whose flame our far-off firmament reflects.
Dismayed are all the superstitious tribe
Of frightened folk. Of war and pestilence
False prophets prate, of famine and distress,
And eke the fronting hour of final doom.
Only with gladness thrills the tipler's heart
In fancied foretaste of the comet's touch
Upon the favored season's vintage cast.
But from the world's commotion all aloof,
The astronomer, with raptured vision, stands
And marks the midnight's fiery wanderer.
The spectrum catches tokens from his light
Of elemental kindredship with earth,
And fancy hints of ancient dwellers there.
With eager glass the astronomer attends
The trav'ller's sun surrounding course, and maps
With careful scale, the leadings of the path
That outward bears to distant voids again.
With flagging pace and breath that wanes of fire,
The lonely wand'rer wends. But in his heart
A dream of resurrection sleeps. What time
He yearneth for a larger life, whereto
His single power cannot attain, behold
From distant scopes, where universes teem,
An errant comrade, as by chance appears.
By gravitation's mutual greetings lured,

They quit their courses, and, with gath'ring speed,
Impetuous to collision rush. Space pulses
With awful thunders where they meet, and night
Is raptured with a dream of fire. And now,
With gravitative searchings through the Vast
Their doubled mass, with wider ordinance,
More night-embosomed comets summons forth.
Responding spaces yield their homeless broods.
With wild delight from every side they rush,
And glowing in their passionate embrace,
Illumine flamingly the regions round.

O Light, in beauty's holy guise begot
Through atom-motions kissing in their play!
Art thou requited love's surprising child?
Or art thou of the progeny of war
Whose passion, wrought to zeal igniferous,
Dissolveth all to fiery turbulence
Of gaseous hurricanes a-whirl? Perhaps
We greet thee best as toil-engendered boon;
For, after wanderings orderless and dark,
A common will the meeting atoms ply;
Their immemorial desires at length
To candent life in quick fruition flash,
Burning the night from space.

There still prevails
A chaos wild of contravening storms:
The fiery masses interpenetrant

Are seething as in Bacchic revelry.
Wider and wider in their mazy gyres
The glowing circles spin, till lo ! at last
Their currents mix in one vast vortex-whirl
To mould anon a pageantry of worlds.
Amid the chaos infant Order breathes.
In swift revolvency the planets sweep
As fiery spheres about the central sun,
Whose sovereignty as vassals they obey.
But where the cooling surface darkens round,
Impending vapors loose their liquid stores ;
Seas surge with thund'rous tides against the rocks,
And over all an airy heaven hangs.

Albeit the elements divided are,
For closer union evermore they strive,
And where, in faithful love connubial
They blend, cells quicken in the pregnant sod.
The tender germs unfold their gath'ring life
And teem a myriad hordes, after their kind.
The promptings of affinity beget
A living growth of co-aptative forms,
Where, with reciprocative laborings
Of complemental functions, they may move
With nobler rule amid the elements.
A higher life is piercing into being :
From night's sensationless rigidity,
Precursor of a spiritual day,
The kindling light of consciousness doth gleam.

The multiplying tribes of living forms,
In struggle for existence, ever toil,
Till all the world a plain of battle grows,
Creature to creature dealing doom of death,
For hunger's or for passion's goading sake.
But keener and of larger use the sway
Of whetted powers becomes that ply the strife ;
And ever the appropriated gain,
In stern heredity's bequeathment held,
From generation unto generation,
Following fast, is yielded to the years ;
And though for rest a-yearn, the failing lives
Of ancient ages lapsed to death's dark realm,
Their aspirations and their toils endure :
The soul of all their being liveth yet
In lives their lives projected hitherward.

The soul's day breaketh. Consciousness appears
With clearing light, and Reason learns at last
Her powers to marshal and her realms to rule.
In pleasing modulations language rings,
Like speech of gods, to ears initiate. Here
The poets find their rhythmic ravishment ;
Here, too, desire, for knowledge all athirst,
In never-sating draughts her fever feeds ;
And, borrowing illumination here,
Abyssmal depths the spirit penetrates,
Where, wrapt in mystic silences and glooms,
The slumb'ring secrets of creation lie.

Transfiguring th' unfolding universe,
Cognition's sunbeams spread and glow.
They bring to ignorance, whose feeble eyes,
By superstition's lowering clouds are dimmed,
A lore assuasive of celestial truth ;
And unto error's night, that, prison-like,
Encompasseth th' aspiring soul of man,
The promise of deliverance they bear
From false illusion's lures and mockeries.

O holy sun, in all the circling host
Of bleak and darkened worlds, with touch benign
Light, warmth, and thrilling life awakening,
Thyself for others willingly thou givest
In sacrifice, and pourest forth thy gifts
Unstintedly to all the needful worlds ;
Nor reckest thou if thanks thy largess greet,
If ingrate fools reject thine offering,
Or evil-doers warp its sacred use.
For others dost thou live, for others die.
So he that would the world illumine gives
Himself, his heart-blood freely yielding up.
The thorny crown resignedly he wears ;
The martyr's scourging suffers and the taunts,
And on the cross finds ignominious death.
For this the glorious radiance of his life
Longeth again to find the ancient night.
For all the world it offered up itself,
And findeth in surcease of labor peace.

As wintry years around the cooling sun
Fold darkening, life faileth on the worlds.
An arctic desolation everywhere
To heedless heavens appeals despairingly.
The wedging frosts dispart the shapely spheres,
And drifting fragments mark the erstwhile worlds.
With widening distances space presses in
The sundered masses to estrange, till lo !
Across the voids as comet-forms they range.

But as the morning ever wakes the eyes
Whose weariness the evening sealed with sleep ;
As never life the doom of death can thwart,
(Though genial resurgence foils the tomb
With life rejuvenised in serial birth) ;
As night and day, in alternating layers,
From time unfold : so too the world respires :
The tides of life in rhythmic surges rise,
Ever to ebb in restless billows back
Where call the soundless Deeps ; then upward heave
With gathered stress of nobler life again.
Thus ever from the grave is life redeemed,
And ruins wake to spheres regenerate,
Gemming the circle of eternity
With threaded universes evermore.